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Patty Berg



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Dear Friends,

As always, I thank you for taking time to read my letters. I also want to thank those of you who continue to send your notes of encouragement and support for my efforts in Sacramento.

By now, you're probably well aware of the governor's decision to call a special election for this November. We can rest assured we're all going to hear quite a bit about that in the coming months.

In the meantime, the budget has center stage in the state Capitol.

In real terms, Democrats and Republicans are not very far apart on what they expect to see in next year's spending plan. But, as I've said many times, a budget is a statement of values, and it is there, on values, where the parties must find middle ground.

I want a budget that fulfills our commitment to education, acknowledges our responsibility to senior citizens, and delivers on pledges to improve our roads and highways. Democrats have offered just such a budget, and are working with our Republican colleagues to hammer out the differences and come to a workable compromise.

I continue working on my package of bills. Among those moving forward are measures to make it easier for cities and counties to fight the spread of AIDS; to put rural school children in safer school buses; to help families who are caring for ailing or elderly loved ones; and to respect the dignity and autonomy of the terminally ill.

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Patty Berg".

Assemblywoman, 1st District

Twin Crises of Age and Perpetual Budget Shortfalls

A truly great crisis -- the kind that leads to gas rationing, or rolling blackouts -- is usually a combination of smaller crises that are easily ignored or badly handled.

That's what's happening now with the Aging Boom.

The fact that we'll soon have more than twice as many elderly residents is only the beginning of the problem. With enough resources and determination, we could begin taking measures now that could make California a model for the entire nation.

But ongoing budget shortfalls mean we simply don't have the resources needed to fully prepare for this historic demographic shift.

That's why I continue to push for development and implementation of the Master Plan on Aging. We have to start now, and we have to do what we can

with the resources at hand, or we will be caught off guard, unprepared, and a great many of the neediest Californians will pay a terrible price.

We've learned a lot, planned a lot, and made great headway in understanding the problems ahead.

But most of the solutions we've identified cost money -- a real problem in Sacramento. So, we're going to take it from another angle, and we're going to begin with a series of informational hearings.

We'll be gathering policy experts and senior citizens, and we'll try to pinpoint where the greatest need will be, what the biggest challenges are, and how can we handle the great range of needs of the most diverse aging population in the nation. Because we know all too well that ignoring a crisis won't make it go away.

Sorting Out Changes in Prescription Drug Coverage

Everyone who relies on Medi-Cal or Medicare will soon have to make an important decision about prescription drug plans, and this decision is going to have a significant affect on their health and their wallets.

Unfortunately, most people who are going to be affected don't even realize the clock is ticking.

In all likelihood, a great many of them are going to miss the deadline. That will cost them money, and it will dramatically limit their ability to get the medicine they need when they need it.

This all started when Congress added a prescription drug benefit to Medicare. That sounds like a good thing, but it also puts senior citizens and low-income people into a confusing maze of competing plans provided by private insurance companies.

But it's here now and we have to make the best of it. As you know, I've spent a lifetime working on issues that affect the elderly, so I'm determined to do everything in my power to help people in our district get signed up to a plan that makes sense for them, and do it before

the deadline.

Because if you miss the deadline, federal law says your Medicare premiums are going to go up -- 1 percent per month, with no cap. So if you delay for a year, your premiums would go up be 12 percent.

So, here's what you need to do: Make a list of your medicines, know their name, strength, number of pills in the bottle, and whether they're brand-name or generic.

Then, in October, when the specific plans are made available, you need to study and compare them, looking for the one that covers most of your medicines, at the best cost.

I know that's not going to be easy. The lists will be confusing. You won't be able to see them until October, and you'll have to decide as early as January or risk being assigned to a plan at random.

The most important thing for now is to know that it's coming, and to know that help will be available.

A good place to turn is the Health Insurance Counseling and Advocacy Program (HICAP).

You can get more information by calling HICAP toll-free at (800) 434-0222.

4.1 million Californians are eligible for Medicare, that's more than 1 out of 9 of us who rely on government health care. More than 1 million of those receive help from both the state and federal governments.

Congratulating California Conservation Corps Grads



In 1976, Governor Jerry Brown established the **California Conservation Corps**. It became a permanent state agency in 1983. It is now the oldest, largest and longest-running conservation corps in the world.

Patty Berg speaks to California Conservation Corps members who spent their evening hours to earn their high school degrees, during a ceremony June 10. She congratulated them and urged them to "Nurture your passion, feed what drives you, and you will build rich and worthy lives, full of dignity and meaning."

Coffee Break

Summer Sizzler

L G N I P M A C B N T K I N B
 B L S H O R T S O E H N Y E G
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 N U V K N T E L B S R Y C D E
 I C E F L G S S O E F N L C E
 V X P Y N K M U I V I J P B R
 I S W I M M I N G C N U A U C
 D A K G N Q R V S U G I B K S
 F I T I F D E R Q V A M S T N
 H V U Q U I O S D T G W E N U
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AUGUST
 BEACH
 BICYCLES
 CAMPING
 DIVING
 HIKING
 JULY
 JUNE
 PICNICS
 SHORTS
 SUNSCREEN
 SURFING
 SWIMMING
 VACATION
 VOLLEYBALL

Words can be written diagonally, bottom to top or backwards.